

We're in this Together:  
A Study of Christian Youth Ministry Programs

Mary B. Kleist

Educational Foundations 474

Professor Suzanne Fondrie

December 21, 2005

## **Abstract**

The following study details my personal experiences as a youth ministry leader and the research I have done in an attempt to strengthen the youth program at St. John's Episcopal Church and Center for Inner Peace in New London, Wisconsin. My research consisted of personal experience as a youth ministry leader, personal interviews with other youth ministry leaders, and literary research about youth ministry as a whole. The study led me to restructure the youth program of St. John's by simply reintegrating principles we had already been implementing haphazardly.

*For Julianna, Jordan, Eden, Jaden, Savannah and Ashlynn:*

*May the cycle be broken for you.*

## Table of Contents

The Dilemma: Too Much of Nothing.....	5
My Ministry with the Youth of St. John’s.....	6
Youth as “Other”.....	8
A Variety of Youth.....	10
Youth Ministry as Incarnational.....	12
Cookie-Cutter Attempts to Avoid the Cookie-Cutter Approach.....	13
The Role of the Family.....	17
The Role of the Youth Leader.....	19
“There’s Gotta Be Something More”.....	21
What More Could There Be?.....	22
The Missing Link in Youth Ministry.....	23
St. John’s: A Mixture of Ministry Principles.....	24
A Center for Inner Peace.....	26
A Newly Improved Youth Ministry Program.....	28
The Reality of Healing the Youth.....	32
References.....	35
Appendices.....	36

## **The Dilemma: Too Much of Nothing**

It is late fall. Darkness consumes the world around us. Inside the dimly lit church library, I sit with the high school youth group and our pastor. Our pastor is asking us to discuss what it means to be a Christian nowadays according to a Bible passage we just read. I have been in class all day every week day for months. I have also been working at a group home and volunteering at the local school district. I am exhausted from all the demands of my life. I cannot even imagine what our youth are feeling. They are involved with all the same kinds of activities I am, as well as playing sports. They do not even have the luxury I have as a college student of going to just a couple classes each day. They have to sit in school all day every day. I want to be here-I came here voluntarily-but I cannot even remember what Bible passage we just read, much less see a connection to my life. What about these youth, especially those who are not here voluntarily? We all came here thinking this would be something different from the rest of our lives, but I feel like I am back in the classroom. I imagine they feel the same way. How do I, as a youth ministry leader, help engage them, when I am not even engaged myself?

Such a situation presents us with a very real dilemma in youth ministry: the youth have countless demands on them, but none of the activities in which they partake are fulfilling their deepest needs. All their activities combined still leave a hunger, and they are left searching for something more. They come to a Wednesday night Christian youth discipleship program to find that one missing link, but the expressions on their faces are the same expressions I saw on students' faces just five hours ago when I was helping out in the local school district, where the students were similarly disconnected from the subject matter. These same youth come each week for a few months, but then, as we fail

to provide that one missing link (as we, too, fail to meet their deepest needs), attendance becomes irregular. Some of those who come only do so because their parents force them. They are present physically, but they have hidden their hearts from us. We have not spoken their language. They do not want to listen. How do we break into their hearts of stone when they do not give us access to their hearts?

### **My Ministry with the Youth of St. John's**

In July of 2004, the leaders of St. John's Episcopal Church in New London called a meeting in which they discussed the need for a leader to take over the youth program, or at least assist with it, to create a new vision and a new direction that would work to deepen the faith relationships its youth had with their Lord. In other words, the church needed a leader to come in and bring new life into the program (B. Schramm, personal communication, February 26, 2005). I had already been considering joining St. John's, with my only reluctance being the fact that I did not want to give up my leadership position in the youth program of my former church to join a church where I would have no leadership position. Upon learning of the need for a youth leader at St. John's, I took advantage of the opportunity to join the church and, as a new member, still participate in youth ministry. I spoke with the pastor of St. John's, Fr. Paul Feider, several times throughout the remainder of the summer months before joining the youth ministry team in the fall, which consisted, at the time, of Fr. Paul Feider and Kathy & Dan LeClair. I was excited to join the team and bring a fresh perspective of the needs our youth had. I felt comfortable in the position, as I was only a few years older than our youth and had grown up just a town away. I assumed I had the kids all figured out and could bring the answers St. John's was looking for.

For the 2004-2005 school year, I worked with Fr. Feider at the high school level, while Mr. and Mrs. LeClair led the middle school ministry. I tried to bring in leadership ideas at the start of the school year but soon found out I did not know these kids as well as I had thought. Although I had some good insights, I found myself unprepared to be a youth ministry leader who could bring new life into the program. Therefore, I took a step back and spent most of the year observing, only taking active leadership responsibilities for a small number of youth group sessions. This role of observer allowed me to have time to get to know the youth and discern certain needs, as well as identify which tactics were effective and which were ineffective. After a year of such inventory, I have used late spring and all of summer 2005 researching youth programs across the country and talking with local youth leaders about their programs.

In my research, I have learned that youth ministry is something that perplexes most adults. Eight years is the average for a youth ministry leader to remain in such a leadership position (K. Staeger, personal communication, August 8, 2005). After that, youth workers burn out or lose heart. Such a significant turnover rate in leadership may indicate a problem in the approach to youth ministry.

A search on Academic Search Elite under terms such as “Christian youth ministry,” “Christian youth programs,” “youth groups,” “high school students and church,” “church work with youth,” “teenagers and religion,” “religious communities,” “adolescents and religious life,” “teenage faith,” “mission work of church,” “preaching to youth,” “Christian life,” and “young adults and faith” reveals that there really is a limited amount of research available regarding youth ministry. The board of directors of the Association of Youth Ministry Educators acknowledges a lack of solid research studies in

this field in an editorial: “At some point...if we are to continue to enable youth ministry to grow as an academic equal of other traditional liberal arts disciplines, some of us need to commit the time and effort to conduct and/or oversee research for the good of the Kingdom” (2004). In other words, there is a stated need for more research, mostly long-term research, in the field of youth ministry. Regardless, I did find some interesting writing regarding different approaches to youth ministry.

### **Youth as “Other”**

In the world today, adolescents are sometimes viewed as members of a culture separate from that of adults. As Christian Smith, professor of sociology at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, Ph.D. candidate at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, (2005) state: “Adults of all sorts in religious communities should be taught to stop thinking about teenagers as aliens or others. Any generation gap that exists between teens and adults today is superficial compared with and far outweighed by generational continuities” (p. B2). Approaching youth as an “Other” is popular but puts unnecessary distance between adults and youth. I encountered a large body of literature that speaks about evangelizing youth as a mission field, which evidences the idea that youth are seen as having a culture of their own.

Rock the World Youth Mission Alliance, an organization based in Pennsylvania that conducts Christian youth retreats, sponsors a youth ministry training seminar entitled “Striking Fire.” In their *Striking Fire Youth Ministry Training Guide*, Rock the World defines youth ministry as a missional ministry. However, the training guide makes a special note of this term: “‘missions’ to youth is not quite the same as ‘missions’ to another country or people group. But there are enough distinctions in youth culture that



missionary methods are appropriate in doing youth ministry” (2004, p. 5). Rock the World is careful not to create excess distance between youth and adults, but the term has been picked up and used somewhat carelessly in literature on youth ministry to indicate a larger gap between youth and adults than what is natural.

A cultural gap which does exist but which is not typically recognized is the gap between the church, which has largely remained unchanging, and the experience of people in the physical world. As Brian Krum (2005), a Baptist youth pastor of 16 years who currently lectures at Carey Baptist College, recognizes that “there is a profound unlikeness between the culture within which (youth) operate and the culture within which the church has long dwelt” (p. 27). In essence, what is happening is that the church is failing to meet the needs of the youth (and many others, for that matter), but it then blames those not receiving what they need for not needing what is available. It is essential that this fallacy be revealed and eliminated, for the church cannot change to meet people’s needs if it does not understand who it needs to reach out to and what it needs to do to reach those people.

Francis Brienan (1998), associate secretary of the Training and Education division of the Council for World Mission in London, states the rationale for a need to accurately understand youth: “...fundamentally it is what we *believe* about young people that will determine how we approach them” (p. 244). The term “mission field” must be clarified when used in reference to youth ministry so that those using the term and those hearing the term do not connote youth ministry with foreign ministry and falsely identify youth as another culture altogether. If youth leaders do not understand the needs of youth, it will be impossible for the ministry in question to reach the heart of its youth.

## **A Variety of Youth**

When entering into leadership in youth ministry, one encounters a variety of youth. One leader cannot give full attention to every youth in a given program. It is essential for any one leader to focus on certain groups of youth in order to deliver quality attention to those most in need of it. Mark Charles (2003), a youth ministry leader in East Belfast, identifies two large groups of youth:

I work with two distinct groups of young people and, while I hate these terms, they are best described as a “churched” group and an “unchurched” group. The guys that have been around the church for all their lives are a real privilege to be with... They are the type of young people to whom we all like to attach ourselves. The “unchurched” guys are, as you might imagine, a little bit different. Many negative terms, such as uncouth or careless could best describe them. They are the type of young people who are often not a privilege to be around. This is the kind of person in whom the church sometimes chooses not to be interested. (p. 213)

Ideally, youth ministry should be done in teams, with each team member focusing on one small group so that no individual youth is left unattended. Unfortunately, there will not always be enough ministry leaders available to meet the demands of the kids. Therefore, those young people most in need of ministering, who, as Charles alludes to, will also be the ones most resistant to it, must not be ignored. Inexperienced ministry leaders must be careful not to attach themselves only to the youth who are easily reached. The young people who are resistant are, in some ways, more in need of a ministry leader’s attention than those who are open and accessible.

In identifying and working with groups of youth, it is also important to note that youth cannot be ministered to as a group. That is, while one youth leader may focus on a certain group of youth, each youth is an individual and must be ministered to as such. That is to say, as Brienan (1998) asserts, “Young people are not a homogenous mass.

They have different ways of thinking, living and believing” (241). Even youth who have similar life experiences will have differing needs, as individuals react differently to each situation they encounter.

While youth respond differently to their personal experiences, both the church and unchurched youth are seeking for similar needs to be met. Charles (2003) recognizes this point in saying:

One thing that the “churched” and “unchurched” groupings share is their post-modern attitude to religion. The “churched” group have no heart for manmade religion but they do have a hunger for the person of Jesus Christ, and build up their faith by belonging to groups that share this hunger. The “unchurched” may claim to belong to a religion, so that they can determine which side to be a part of, and which side to riot with in our divided society. But I have found from working with them that these young people also have no time for the workings of religion. They do hunger after belonging to something, and that might even be a church, but they have no time or care for religious practice. (216)

In essence, Charles is explaining the fact that, regardless of their differences, youth as a whole are somewhat resistant to religion as an institution. They are seeking a personal spirituality but not necessarily under the context of an orthodox religious organization.

Lack of interest in religious institutions presents a problem for those doing youth ministry in the context of a church youth group. That problem is that if the unchurched are really the ones who need attention, how do we attract them to an environment they are already repelled by before they even set foot in the door? The practical answer is that some youth will not ever be able to receive ministry from such a setting. The key is to do what is possible with those to whom one does have physical access, which means adapting ministry style to each individual. Charles (2003) recognizes this responsibility and explains that his style of ministry is very gentle, so as not to scare off youth whose attendance begins in a precarious manner:

As young people come through our doors we seek not to badger them into make a decision for Christ. We do try to get to know them and their situations, and we pray wholeheartedly that they will see Christ in us and seek him as a result. We aim to build community where lives can be changed by choice. (216)

Charles' ministry style is based on giving youth the space and freedom they need to grow in their personal faith before asking them to make any type of commitment. Such caution is essential in healing the wounds inflicted upon youth by adults who have sought to force them into a relationship with their Lord.

### **Youth Ministry as Incarnational**

Giving youth space and freedom to grow in their personal spirituality is similar to a relatively new ministry approach known as incarnational ministry. Incarnational ministry principles oppose the traditional cookie cutter, or one-size-fits-all, approach to youth ministry in which youth ministry leaders take programs that are successful in a particular setting or community and implement them in their church community, only to find that they are unsuccessful in this new context. Brad Widstrom, Assistant Professor of Youth and Family Ministries at Denver Seminary in Denver, Colorado, tried this approach as a novice youth leader and quickly discovered its ineffectiveness. Widstrom (2003) states what he learned through experience: "Ministry success only came when I realized that ministry, while being grounded in unchanging theology and transferable philosophy, must be implemented through methodology that is locally contextualized" (p. 71). In other words, there are certain principles that are unchanging, regardless of where one is and what one is doing in youth ministry, but overall, youth ministry has to be a response to local conditions to meet the personal needs of the youth involved.

Incarnational ministry (also known as relational ministry) picks up where cookie cutter ministry drops the ball. Aran Walter, youth pastor at St. Thomas Episcopal Church

in Menasha, Wisconsin, advocates the use of incarnational ministry. Walter describes incarnational ministry: “when you know Jesus, He goes with you wherever you go and is available to others through your relationships” (A. Walter, personal communication, February 1, 2005). Walter explains that understanding and using incarnational ministry is more important than formal training for youth ministry leaders:

You do want leaders around you who are trained, but they don’t necessarily have to have any sort of degree... You need your leaders to have relational training. They need to know about building relationships and that it’s not about a program—it’s about the kids... Be serious about incarnational ministry... You have to get your youth leaders to buy into that. They don’t always need to be talking about Jesus to bring the kids to Him; they need to know Jesus. You can’t talk about Christ successfully until you have a relationship with the kids. Then you can let the kids bring more kids. Don’t make it your job to recruit more youth group members. Focus on your kids and they will bring the others. Just hang out and get to know your kids. (A. Walter, personal communication, February 1, 2005)

Walter goes on to give an example of relational ministry at work:

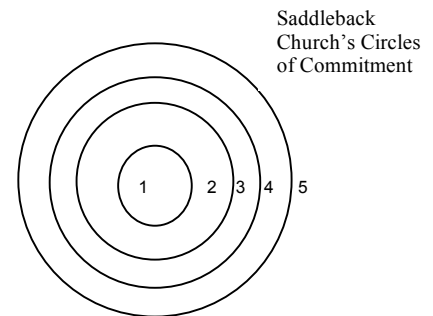
You need to have a staff that is committed to the kids. You have to demand it, otherwise the relationships aren’t formed and the youth are denied a relationship with Christ. An example of a church with committed leaders is Willow Creek, a non-denominational church in Chicago. They have 2,500 youth, 4-5 youth pastors on staff, and loads of leaders to run small groups. It is a lot of work and takes a lot of time, but it fosters the intimacy necessary. (A. Walter, personal communication, February 1, 2005)

Incarnational ministry is an example of a ministry principle that can be applied to any youth ministry environment, but it also includes tailoring the situation to be a response to local and personal needs.

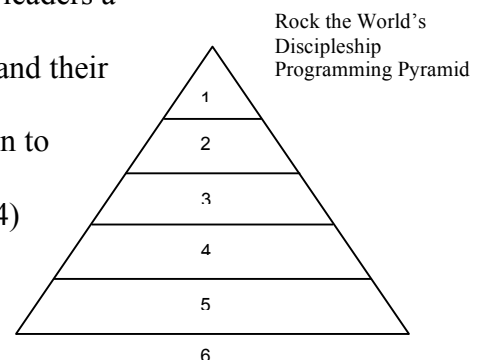
### **Cookie-Cutter Attempts to Avoid the Cookie-Cutter Approach**

There are ministry leaders out there who recognize there are problems with the way youth ministry is approached. Such leaders recognize that the problem is in approaching youth ministry as a youth program and focusing on a program rather than on the youth. Doug Fields, a youth minister, speaker, and ministry trainer from southern

California, is such a leader who discusses the importance of having the correct focus in a youth program (i.e., focusing on the youth) in his book, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*. Fields encourages youth workers not to let the program be as important as the youth themselves, because “putting programs before people creates problems” (1998, p. 85). He explains that no one program will ever meet the needs of every youth. The team of ministry leaders at Fields’ church, Saddleback Church, uses an image of five concentric circles they call the “Circles of Commitment” to identify the different audiences targeted by individual ministry events (Fields, 1998, p. 87). The five layers of audiences represented by this image, seen above, are: (5) community, (4) crowd, (3) congregation, (2) committed, and (1) core (Fields, 1998, p. 87). Each level represents a different level of commitment, with the center level of the core persons being the most committed to spiritual growth.



This model of a target to locate target audiences is helpful, but I prefer the model used by Rock the World. Rock the World uses an image of a pyramid to design programming events that will, as a whole, provide for the needs of every youth present in the program. The programming pyramid gives youth leaders a visual aid to make sure they are including all youths and their needs. The six levels represented on the pyramid, seen to the right, are: (6) pool of humanity, (5) come level, (4) grow level, (3) disciple level, (2) develop level and (1) multiply level. These levels are similar to the



Circles of Commitment's divisions, but the pyramid is much more descriptive of the specific target audience represented by each level.

The idea behind the pyramid is to illustrate the fact that there is a large pool of youth in the world. Not all of them are ready to have a deep relationship with their Lord. There are fewer kids truly committed to their Lord than there are kids who want to come to events just to hang out. However, no single youth's needs are any more or less important than another. People at each level must be provided an opportunity to learn, grow, and exercise their faith in a way they are comfortable doing so. As the level of commitment increases, numbers drop. That is, fewer students will seek to multiply and evangelize than those who are simply coming to the programming events. The youth leader's job is to encourage each level to grow in commitment and ascend levels, providing them with the opportunities to do so. Each level has significant questions youth leaders can use to design activities to include the youth at that level. The levels can be described, according to Rock the World (2004) in their *Striking Fire Youth Ministry Training Guide*, as follows:

**Pool of Humanity:** These are all the people in the “pool” where your ministry is targeted. The defining characteristics of this group are usually age and geography. They share no defining spiritual characteristics, except they are all made in the image of God. They do not necessarily come to your programs. This is one reason you need to go to them. In fact, that's how you do ministry at this level. You GO to them. Their key questions: How can I have fun? Does anyone love me? (*Note: a youth program does not program for these youth, because they are, by definition, students who do not come to the program. Leaders do contact work, but do not program for them.*)

**Come Level:** These are kids in the Pool of Humanity who come to your program if something interests them enough. They attend your program for non-spiritual reasons. They may or may not have any spiritual curiosity or motivation, but anything that interests them is worth showing up for—especially if they know and like someone else who is showing up. At this level, ministry is about creating relationships: social, recreational, and just plain old good clean fun. God made

kids to play, and pure fun has a legitimate place in ministries that address young people's needs. Their questions: How can I have fun at this meeting?

**Grow Level:** These are the kids from the Come Level who have begun to grow spiritually curious. Some are already asking questions about God and Jesus, and how they affect their daily life. The Grow Level is where red-blooded evangelism kicks in. Their questions: What is the meaning of life? Who is Jesus, really?

**Disciple Level:** The students on this level have made a decision to follow Jesus. This is the level where the basic Christian disciplines appear: prayer, worship, Bible study, etc. It's the level where God begins to challenge a lot of the garbage in students' lives—drinking, sex, attitudes towards parents, drugs, gossip, pornography, etc. This is also the level where God's healing begins to kick in for victims of abuse, kids of alcoholic family systems, etc. These issues can appear anywhere on the pyramid. But when students decide to let the Lord into their lives, God's power is released through their faith. You do ministry with these youth by means of mentoring, small group Bible studies, and challenging them to change their lives and behaviors (i.e. discipleship). Their question: How can I follow Jesus better?

**Develop Level:** The focus of these youth has shifted from taking care of only their own spiritual life to caring for the spiritual lives of others. When this happens, you probably have an emerging leader on your hands. At this point, your agenda as a youth missionary begins to shift from discipleship to mentoring and support. These people need to try their wings in leadership: first in projects, next with younger kids, and finally with peers. These are the youth you should consider inviting to be on the Youth Ministry Leadership Team. Their question: How can I help others follow Jesus better?

**Multipler Level:** Finally, at the top of the pyramid, multipliers may appear. On top of their interest is helping others' spiritual lives/growth. These are people who invent ministry systems that cause spiritual chain reactions. II Timothy 2:2 describes the Multiplier mentality: "the things you have heard from me entrust to reliable men who will also be able to teach others." What kind of program do you invent for these people? Maybe you should let THEM invent the program! Up until now they've been following you. It may be time to move to the advanced stage of missionary strategy when you support them as they lead. Their question: How can I create a ministry system that will cause a spiritual chain reaction?

*(Note: Leaders do not program for these youth, because leaders let these kids take the reigns and invent programs for those below them.) (pps. 25-26)*

The benefit of using Rock the World's pyramid descriptions is that they are thorough enough to allow a youth leader to place young people in the proper stages of development and then guide them in growing and ascending the pyramid levels of commitment. The pyramid has a place for every youth, but allows each one to be an individual by



separating her/him according to her/his basic needs and interests. The pyramid also gives leaders who use it the freedom to apply basic principles to a local context.

### **The Role of the Family**

Another general principle that cannot be ignored but must be used differently as a response to personal needs of the youth involved is the place the family holds in a youth ministry program. Pamela Smith McCall, an Ohio journalist, investigated one family-focused approach to youth ministry that is being used by youth leader Tim Tahtinen at the United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin. McCall (2001) writes, “Tahtinen’s family-based program grew out of Faith Incubators (FINK), a Lutheran organization...FINK parents are expected to show up and participate with their teens in everything from teen-style praise and worship to Bible studies and personal sharing to camping trips” (p. 22). This family-based approach to youth ministry of including the parents in youth activities is based on the idea that parents need to take center-stage in directing their children’s spiritual education and growth. As David Anderson from the Youth and Family Institute explains, “Youth pastors are not meant to be the experts in the spiritual life of other people’s children. Youth ministries must be redesigned to help parents do the wholistic job that they must do in order to be effective” (cited in McCall, 2001, p. 23). In other words, the idea behind focusing on the family is that it is the youth pastor’s and youth ministry’s job to assist the family in guiding the youth in their spiritual growth journeys, not to be the sole provider of spiritual direction for youth.

Indeed getting the family involved is important: “statistically, kids have a better chance at making it as Christians if their families are involved” (C. Martinson, personal communication, August 23, 2005). Fr. Paul Franzmeier of Faith Christian Church in New

London uses a family-based approach as the foundation for all of the ministries of his parish. Franzmeier and the Faith Christian Community was instrumental in the formation of a nondenominational youth group, called “Beyond Belief,” for any and all youth in New London and the surrounding areas. Since its formation, Franzmeier has turned directing duties over to New Life Church in New London but still encourages the youth of his parish to attend (P. Franzmeier, personal communication, August 4, 2005).

Although they do not have an official youth program that runs during the school year, Franzmeier teaches a quiet-time course over the summer. It is aimed primarily at youth from third grade to high school age, but some adults also take advantage of this opportunity and attend the course. Anyone who is able to read proficiently enough to understand scriptures is welcome, because the course focuses on teaching students how to read and understand scriptures on their own to have a lifetime relationship with God. It focuses on questions such as “How do you connect to God each day? How do you get strength from God on your own from your own study?” After this eight-week course (which meets once a week) is completed, Franzmeier arranges meetings with the parents of the youth who attended in order to create a follow-up plan. The plan is meant to involve the parents in keeping the youth accountable for taking what they have learned during the course and applying it to their lives. In this way, Franzmeier’s program models family-based youth ministry that works, for there are many youth who come back to the course in subsequent summers to continue deepening their faith relationships with Jesus Christ (P. Franzmeier, personal communication, August 4, 2005).

While parents play an important role in any adolescent’s spiritual development, youth need time away from their parents as they struggle to build an independent identity.

Mike Yaconelli is a youth leader and writer who recognizes a problem with focusing too strongly on parental participation in youth ministry:

Yaconelli explains he is reluctant to adopt the family-based approach because there aren't enough parents available who place their faith high as a top priority for their children. They are in favor of Christianity, he says, as long as they think it is going to make their kid into a nice person. But as soon as it becomes genuine Christian faith, they start to worry. This generation of parents is ambitious for its children, and can't let anything get in the way of their future "success" (cited in McCall, 2001, p. 23).

Yaconelli recognizes the reality of parental participation. Programs with parents, such as the FINK program, can be done effectively, but using such an approach runs the risk of isolating youth whose parents are not only absent from the program's events but who are also unsupportive of the program and their child's participation. A significant number of youth are alienated and left unfulfilled if the core of a program includes requiring parental participation. Youth need a safe place to grow in their personal spiritual identities. A safe place includes the opportunity to explore their own deepest needs. For some, that means parents must not be present, because parents are the source of their deepest and most painful wounds.

### **The Role of the Youth Leader**

Youth leaders take on a significant role when youth are separated from their parents for ministry. However, I found little discussion worthy of noting relating to the place of the youth ministry leader. What I find missing in the discussion is the fact that, perhaps youth ministry is so difficult for adults to tackle because they are trying to meet the needs of youth without understanding what those needs are, just as the leaders' needs were not understood when they were young. In this way, a cycle has been established in which adults assume they know what young people need without first listening to them.

Counselor and writer John Bradshaw discusses this unfortunate cycle in his work. Bradshaw devotes an entire book, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, to discussing the negative effects of one specific unfulfilled need that is destructive: toxic shame. He begins the book by defining toxic shame as “an excruciatingly internal experience of unexpected exposure. It is a deep cut felt primarily from the inside. It divides us from ourselves and from others. In toxic shame, we disown ourselves” (1988, p. 3). After defining toxic shame, Bradshaw gives a description of how it is passed from generation to generation in his discussion of the negative effects of toxic shame, which is an unhealthy and destructive form of the normal human emotion of shame:

Toxic shame...is passed from one generation to the next. Shame-based people find other shame-based people and get married...When a child is born to these shame-based parents, the deck is stacked from the beginning...Children need their parents’ time and attention. Giving one’s time is part of the work of love. It means being there for the child, attending to the child’s needs rather than the parent’s needs...Children are clear about what they need and will tell us in no uncertain terms...Needy, shame-based parents cannot possibly take care of their children’s needs. The child is shamed whenever he or she is needy because the child’s needs clash with the parents’ needs. The child grows up and becomes an adult. But underneath the mask of adult behavior there is a child who was neglected. (1988, pps. 25-26)

Bradshaw clearly and competently illustrates how adults (in this case, he specifies parents) fail to meet the needs of children and youth by not actually listening to what it is the young ones need. As Bradshaw states, the youth are clear about what it is they need, but adults cannot step out of their own needs and desires long enough to hear those needs and provide for the youth. Toxic shame is one example of a wound that is passed on in this way, but this cycle is not specific to toxic shame. In the discussion of the cycle of toxic shame, readers can see the cycle of broken parents and youth leaders bringing up broken youth who grow up to raise more broken children. In a world where parents are

unable to meet the needs of their children, it becomes the youth ministry leader's role to try to break this unhealthy cycle by attending to the needs of the youth that the parents are unable to hear.

### **“There's Gotta Be Something More”**

In order for a youth program to rightfully claim to be Christian, it must have an element to it that makes it Christian, as opposed to secular. That is, there must be an aspect to the faith-based organization that is unique to being faith-based. For example, if a youth program spends most of its time in fellowship and service, it is possible, and from my experience it is also likely, that such a program does not offer any opportunities that the local secular student council cannot offer, which spends time in fun activities as well as community service projects. Too many allegedly faith-based organizations do not actually offer a faith-based experience.

Youth ministry is not the only ministry missing that faith-based link, or that “something more.” Francis MacNutt, a Catholic priest of thirty-some years, stated his discovery of the same problem: something missing in Christianity that could help the hopeless. Something Christianity had to offer that was not available anywhere else. He discusses his frustration with searching for this missing link in his latest book, *The Nearly Perfect Crime*. In his early years of ministry, MacNutt counseled people who were deeply depressed and hopeless. Many of them had suffered atrocious abuse, such as years of repeated incest by their fathers. MacNutt struggled to find ways of bringing these people out of depression and giving them hope for the future:

I tried to develop creative methods of coping. Sometimes these people got better but, sadly, the most deeply wounded did well just to hang on to life...It was hard enough for suffering people to handle their pain on the human level, but on the spiritual level what advice was I supposed to give?...They asked me hard

questions: "...I've seen a psychiatrist for years now and I'm still not better. Do you really believe anything will ever change?"...In all honesty I couldn't say yes. If they had not gotten better from their psychiatric treatments, from their medications, from their electric shock therapy, what else could I offer them? (2005, pps. 19-20)

As a priest, MacNutt found he did not have much to offer his clients and parishioners that a counselor could not offer. The only element he could offer that counselors could not was to give his clients the opportunity to repent of their sins and offer them God's forgiveness. Additionally, MacNutt had been trained to direct his clients in relying on willpower to overcome their pain. Unfortunately, forgiveness and willpower had limitations (MacNutt, 2005). He admits that, many times, the only solution he had to offer the hopeless was good advice and human encouragement; "solutions" that could also be found at any non-Christian counseling service.

### **What More Could There Be?**

As MacNutt toyed with different methods of aiding his clientele, he found that the one element of his services that did help people to heal was the love he showed them in spending time with them in counseling and prayer sessions. Regardless of what occurred in those sessions, as long as he showed love to his parishioners, they seemed to slowly gain hope. MacNutt came to realize what had been missing, as he states:

...it became clearer and clearer that most people in this world were crying out for compassion, and they were dying spiritually and emotionally because they did not receive it in a healthy way.

It is a psychological law that we need to be loved into being. Similarly, Jesus' great command in the Gospel is that we are supposed to love each other as He has loved us. Why (isn't) it happening? (2005, pps. 22-23)

MacNutt's discovery of the lack of love in the world led him on a journey to discovering a ministry known as the healing ministry.

Since MacNutt's discovery of the healing ministry in the 1960s, he has worked tirelessly to educate people worldwide on the necessity of adopting its theology as proclaimed and demonstrated in the Gospel. The healing ministry is basically a declaration of the healing power of a relationship with the Christian God who came to earth in the form of a man known as Jesus Christ and a belief in Christ's desire and ability to heal any woundedness or brokenness, whether it be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. The healing ministry is based on the understanding that no human is perfect, thus no human love is able to fulfill all of a person's basic needs. If my needs are not met, I am not able to meet your demands, thus your needs are unmet, and you are not able to meet your neighbor's demands, and the cycle goes on and on. As long as we search for our needs to be met in any other way besides from the Creator, we will have an unquenchable thirst for something more (MacNutt, 2005).

### **The Missing Link in Youth Ministry**

In the literature regarding youth ministry, I discovered many critics of ministry principles, which evidences the need for something more in this ministry. However, I did not discover many appropriate solutions. For example, a Canadian youth named Leah McLaren criticizes the way ministry in general is approached but only extends faulty ministry principles in her "solution." Ian Hunter (2001), professor emeritus in the faculty of law at the University of Western Ontario, quotes Leah's reaction to her experience with ministry:

Christian recruiters who persist in trying to make church more accessible to the young by way of up-beat masses and Jesus-loving rock bands have got it all wrong. Young, childless, unmarried, urbanites don't need to start loving God, we need to start fearing God. We need to abandon our reiki sessions and yoga retreats in favour of hymns and hard benches. The church should appeal to our sense of duty, rather than our sense of fun. (p. 35)

While Leah is correct in stating that the church does not need to appeal to the recreational desire for fun, she fails to offer an appropriate solution to the dilemma of a church that is out of touch with the needs of the young people (as well as many adults). Leah is off-base in concluding that the church needs to instill fear in its young people. Teachings about a fearful, angry, vengeful God are not difficult to find. What is not often taught is the truth: that God is not a fearful, angry God; He is a loving God. Herein lies the problem with youth ministry (as well as adult ministry): not enough people preach the love and healing power of a relationship with God. Teaching people to fear God offers an image of a far-off authority figure with whom humans should be uncomfortable. How can that be the missing link in ministry when that is the result of most ministries as they exist today?

Leah's solution can be transformed by applying principles of the healing ministry that MacNutt discovered. While the healing ministry is fairly well-known, I found no youth program in all of my research that directly seeks to proclaim the healing love of Jesus Christ to the youth. The healing ministry and its basic principles are absent from youth ministry, which is not surprising, considering the fact that the healing ministry is also largely rejected in adult ministry, especially by mainline churches. The Christian God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ to bring humans healing and wholeness in the form of unconditional love. That was His stated mission (MacNutt, 2005). Yet I encountered no program that directly recognized this to be Christ's mission, much less used it as the core of establishing youth ministry principles.

### **St. John's-A Mixture of Ministry Principles**

The community of Christians at St. John's Episcopal Church recognize the importance of teaching its parishioners that God is a loving, accepting God, and do so by



applying a mixture of the principles discussed in each of these ministry approaches. First and foremost, in line with Charles' ministry style of giving youth space and freedom to grow in their spirituality, all ministry leaders at St. John's are taught not to pressure anyone who is seeking any type of relationship with their Lord. Visitors are encouraged to "just hang around" as long as they want, and they are never asked to make a commitment before they are ready to do so. As long as they attend, they are bathed in the love of their Lord, whom the ministry leaders know in a personal way. This is also an example of the use of the principles of incarnational ministry, as the relationships visitors/seekers form with ministry leaders eventually link them into relationship with their Lord.

In regards to the role of the family in the youth program, St. John's recognizes the important role parents play in the formation of youths' faith relationships. However, we ask the parents to be partners with us, rather than to be active participants in the program. Volunteers are not turned away, but in general, the role of the parent is to make sure they are informed about what is going on in the youth program and to make sure they get their child(ren) to the activities and encourage them to engage in the program. St. John's does not believe the youth can exist in isolation or be healed in isolation. We do not want to create a youth program that is a separate entity from the rest of the faith community. Instead, the youth program offers the youth a place to focus on their unique needs. Leaders provide a safe place to be separate from parents but do not foster negativity between the youth and their parents. The importance of family can be emphasized without the physical presence of the parental units themselves. In doing so, leaders affirm

parental roles but are also able to communicate to the youth that it is okay to hurt when parents make misguided decisions.

### **A Center for Inner Peace**

As already discussed, in order for a program to be a ministry program, it must have an element to it that is unique to a faith-based organization. That means it must be rooted in theology. While all of the youth programs I studied have a certain amount of theology behind them, none of them are involved in the healing ministry. That does not mean their theologies do not contain elements of the healing ministry, but none are embracing the wealth of knowledge available in healing theology. Such knowledge can be especially useful in youth programs, which have the potential of breaking the current cycle of woundedness that has been passed from generation to generation.

St. John's is a Center for Inner Peace that is on the cutting edge of exploring and practicing the healing ministry. Unfortunately, the youth are not in touch with this ministry, as it is aimed mainly at adults of the community. Our youth ministry team has not been intentional about bringing healing to the youth in a way that they can understand it. That is, we discuss the fact that Jesus' mission was to heal and love us all as individuals, but we have not been showing the youth that they need healing. Youth are in tune with the fact that they need something more than what they typically receive from adults, but they cannot connect Jesus to that if they do not understand that they have suffered wounding that Jesus does not want them to hold onto. It is our job to challenge them in their faith to come to an understanding of this need and be drawn into relationship with their Lord by understanding that they have a responsibility in their faith.

I have seen, in doing youth ministry, that youth do not quite understand the fact that they have a responsibility in their relationship with their Lord. I have found that it is difficult to give youth responsibility in a faith community for a number of reasons. The main reason youth resist responsibility in their faith is because adults have low expectations of youth in the spiritual department and their poor attitude discourages young people from exploring their faith. The logical first step in giving them responsibility in the faith community is handing them responsibility for their own faith. Let us revisit the original problem this project began with: How do we break into their hearts of stone when they do not give us access to their hearts? The answer to that problem is: we don't. It is not the youth leader's responsibility to make sure youths grow in their relationships with their Lord. That is the responsibility of each individual. It is time youth leaders stop trampling on the faith of youth and, instead, trust the youth to manage their own faith commitments.

I acted as a summer camp counselor for the Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac Senior Summer Camp Session in June of 2005. This year, our focus was on giving the campers a reality check in their relationship with God. Each year, we see many campers come back to summer camp to be touched by God, only to return home and leave that experience at camp. That is, they come each year to get their God-fix but do not actually take responsibility in their lives and change their behavior to be more aligned with God's purposes. We challenged the campers to recognize that God is there waiting to love them, but they must first want to be loved and ask Him to enter into their being and help them change their behavior. The week was nothing short of frustrating, as we challenged them to face up to the fact that they were the ones responsible for the depth of their relationship

with their Lord. Halfway through the week, the small discussion group I was leading had hit a brick wall in their ability to connect with leaders at camp. In order to overcome anxieties that were hindering discussion, I stopped them and simply asked them how they were feeling about the week. Conversation as outlined below followed:

Camper: It's frustrating. I was talking with my friends and cabin-mates this morning about this and, it's like...I don't know. It's so different this year. It's like God is here, but He's not doing anything.

Kleist: That's what we've been trying to get across to you this week: He's not doing anything because YOU DIDN'T LET HIM IN!

Following my prompt, the entire group of campers gasped and sighed, paused a moment, then in unison said, "Oooh!" As in, "Aha! The lightbulb just clicked on!" The kids spent the rest of Thursday intensively studying and attending to their inner woundedness. The following day, small group discussion took an encouraging turn:

Kleist: How's everyone doing today? How did the healing mass go? How are you feeling?

Camper (the same one who had objected the day before): I think this is what we all needed.

The rest of the group agreed with her, both verbally and with their body language. While it was a frustrating week, this conversation revealed the fact that the youth needed to be taught that they had a responsibility in their faith, and then they needed some time to work through their difficulties with that concept. They needed guidance in that journey, but ultimately, it was their journey to make. This summer camp experience encouraged me to take the youth of St. John's on a similar journey.

### **A Newly Improved Youth Ministry Program**

In response to the research I have done in the past year regarding youth ministry, my youth ministry team has made changes to the youth program at St. John's. The first

change we made to the program was giving it an updated name. We now call our discipleship classes “Cut2Christ.” The rationale behind the title is that there is a lot of religious fluff taught in the world that complicates peoples’ spiritual journeys. We want to cut all that out and get to the heart of the Gospel teachings. Next, as a youth ministry leadership team, we have committed to one another as a support system. Last year, we only had leaders’ meetings when necessary, such as at the start of the school year. Now, we meet every other week at 6:15 before Cut2Christ begins at 7:00 P.M. on Wednesday nights. Meeting regularly enables us to discuss our concerns with the program and individual kids, as well as to encourage one another and make sure leaders are getting their needs met. As well, we talk about our successes, so as not to get discouraged by only focusing on the areas that still need work.

In response to Rock the World’s programming pyramid, we have made some changes to the opportunities we offer our youth in an attempt to meet the needs of each of the kids’ levels of commitment. The youth program prior to the present program mainly consisted of Christian discipleship education time once a week, with fun events scheduled once in a while. Such a program only met the needs of the youth of the Grow Level, who were only beginning to become spiritually curious, and the Disciple Level, who were genuinely interested in deepening their own spirituality. Our program now offers opportunities that meet the needs of youth of the Come Level, Develop Level, and Multiply Level, as well as the Grow Level and Disciple Level. Additions to the program include:

- Wednesday night youth group now begins at 5:00 P.M. From 5:00-7:00, the youth are invited to come to the church and hang out with their friends. Pizza and soda

are provided by the church. This meets the need of the Come Level youth. They come for fun and just to hang out. Sometimes there are kids who come just for pizza/soda time and then leave when discipleship time begins. This is acceptable, as the idea is to offer all kids a choice in what they feel comfortable committing to in their faith.

- We have begun a Youth Council to give a group of youth leadership roles in the program. The Youth Council is made up of seven of the youth who meet every other week at 6:15 before 7:00 discipleship class. They have responsibilities such as scheduling service events and communicating the unique needs of the youth as a whole to the adult leaders of the youth program so that we can better incorporate the youth into the faith community as a whole. The Youth Council meets the needs of the kids of the Develop Level, who have become interested in taking care of the spiritual lives of others, in addition to their own spiritual lives.
- There are not many youth who reach the Multiply Level of the pyramid, as this involves taking on large responsibilities in leading others to a spiritual faith relationship with their Lord. However, the youth program at St. John's as it has been redesigned does have a place for Multipliers. I can attest to this, because this is exactly the category I fit into. Multipliers program for other youth, which is what I have been doing in revamping the youth program of St. John's.

The changes and additions to the program provide all youth with the opportunity to feel comfortable in their current commitment level. Additionally, the changes to the program invite them to grow in their commitments and faith.

The final changes we made to the youth program involve curricular modifications. After gaining some experience in youth ministry, I felt that I needed some educational resources to assist me as a youth ministry leader. Unfortunately, there are many such resources that are not useful or appropriate to use. Therefore, I carefully chose two Christian education resources for youth that we could use as tools to bring the healing ministry to the youth.

- Pastor Rob Bell from Michigan has produced a series of DVDs called the NOOMA series, a collection of 11 short DVDs (between 10-15 minutes in length). Each DVD focuses on a specific aspect of living a Christian life or following the Christian God. While the short length of the DVDs is the greatest strength of the series (young people do not have much of an attention span for Christian teaching tools so it is good to keep the DVDs short), the DVDs are unable to go into great depth on any topic. We use discussion to build on the principles discussed in each DVD.
- To complement the DVD series, I found a series of discussion booklets called *The Christian Development Series*. This consists of five booklets, each containing several outlines of discussion topics, questions, and activities. The booklets offer good discussion questions, but the activities are somewhat inappropriate for high school students, therefore we do not use the activities as they are explicitly described in the booklets.

With the healing ministry as the core concept, I used these two resources to come up with a one-year lesson outline that would take the youth through a process of examining their own woundedness, which can be found in Appendix A.

Using the resources detailed above, our youth ministry team has begun to challenge our youth in their faith by having them examine themselves. They are in a period of building a personal identity, and we must help them in that task by examining the wounds they have suffered throughout their lifetimes. In doing that, we can introduce them to what their Lord can do for their wounds (put simply, He can heal them, regardless of their severity). In other words, we have been examining and will continue to examine what Jesus can do to heal their wounds and help them discover the man or woman He intends for them to be. The schedule we are following, found in Appendix A, was not made with the intent that we would follow it to the letter: there is flexibility, as we progress and discern different needs or see that we need to go in different directions. However, it gives us an overview of where we want to take the youth this year: we want to teach them that a faith relationship is possible for them to have with their Lord, but they must take on the responsibility of committing to their Lord and building that relationship, if that is what they desire. We cannot do it for them, but we are present to help them along the way.

### **The Reality of Healing the Youth**

In committing to the healing ministry as the basis for youth ministry, we are required to commit to each youth as a personal entity and help them, as individuals, struggle through naming and healing each one of their numerous wounds. This takes much time and effort. But as Michael Warren (2004), youth ministry professor at St. John's University in Queens, New York, writes:

Can it be inconvenient to devote so much time to youth? Yes. But the gospel is inconvenient. In our culture inconvenience is considered worse than having the hungry standing at our gates. Is Jesus convenient? The disciples on their way to



Emmaus were headed away from Jerusalem, but after meeting Jesus they returned the way they had come. Was that turn-around inconvenient? Probably.

As churches start asking what the gospel means in our own time and in our own neighborhoods, youth ministry will become what it should be: an activity shaped by the gospel, alive to the gifts of the young, that teaches practical ways of living out the faith. (p. 31)

Regardless of the inconvenience it causes the youth ministry leaders, the youth deserve the time, attention, and love it takes to get them to understand what it means to go on a faith journey of their own.

I have discussed earlier that it is not the responsibility of the youth leader to provide a faith relationship with God to the youth. Very often, adults fail to recognize the role of the youth in their own faith journeys. Adults try to take away what the youth have and assume, as an adult, they have some sort of credentials that give them the authority to tell youth what sort of faith journey to go on and how to do so. This is what happened to me as a youth: when I began to receive formal education regarding Christianity, my faith was hurt by adults who taught me about Jesus without teaching me how to walk with Him. They attempted to teach me what type of relationship to have with Jesus and how to go about getting that relationship without recognizing that it is a personal journey. My youth leaders were not willing to show me that they, too, were struggling in their journeys. They were not authentic in their teachings. They did not share their personal faith or journeys. They used books to tell me about a Jesus I could not understand. I knew the Jesus that lived in my heart, and I felt as though they ripped Him away from me to replace Him with an impersonal, distant, authority figure.

This inauthentic and distant approach to youth ministry is what leaders need to avoid. Besides being committed to the youth and taking the time to guide them along their journey, it is the responsibility of the youth leader to recognize that the youth are a

part of the leader's faith journey. One who is called into youth ministry not only has something to teach the youth, but has something to learn from the youth. The youth ministry leader is called to rise above her/his pride as an adult, step out, reach out her/his hand and be willing to say, "I'll help you if you help me. We're in this together."

## References

- Association of Youth Ministry Educators. (2004). Editorial: the need for youth ministry research. *The Journal of Youth Ministry*, 3(1).
- Bradshaw, J. (1988). *Healing the shame that binds you*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.
- Brienan, F. (1998). Here today, gone tomorrow? A reflection on the church and young people for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *International Review of Missions*, 87(345), 241-246.
- Charles, M. (2003). Case study: giving them something to “Luk4.” *International Review of Mission*, 92(365), 212-216.
- Fields, D. (1998). *Purpose driven youth ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Hunter, I. (2001). A young religious skeptic offers churches a startling suggestion to attract youth. *Report/Newsmagazine (Alberta Edition)*, 28(2), 35.
- Krum, B. (2005) The missional shift of youth ministry: from cookie cutter to incarnational ministry. *Stimulus*, 13(1), 27-30.
- MacNutt, F. (2005) *The Nearly Perfect Crime*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books.
- McCall, P. S. (2001). All in the family. *Christian Century*, 118(13), 22-23.
- Smith, C. & Denton. M. L. (2005). Teenagers, not aliens. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(26), B2.
- Rock the World. (2004). *Striking Fire Youth Ministry Training Guide*. Pittsburgh, PA: Rock the World.
- Warren, M. (2004). The goal of youth ministry. *The Christian century*, 121(18), 25-31.
- Widstrom, B. (2003) Building contextually-appropriate youth ministries. *The Journal of Youth Ministry*, 2(1), 71-81.

## Appendix A

The following text details the schedule of curricular activities for our newly improved Christian education program for youth.

### **Cut2Christ St. John's Youth Discipleship 2005-2006**

These plans can be used for either middle school or high school, together or separately. Whatever we feel is appropriate at the time.

**September 14:** Social Evening: Cook-out. Bonfire. Welcome sixth graders and acknowledge transition of incoming freshmen.

**September 21:** See You at the Pole: Youth event at New London High School

**September 28:** Cut2Christ Kickoff: Rob Bell's *Noise*

This DVD discusses the difficulty in hearing God's voice with all the noise of life, including audible noise, noise in our thoughts, etc. It raises questions such as: What kind of noise do you have in your life? Do you ever surround yourself with noise intentionally? If so, why? Do you sometimes avoid silence because you're afraid of what God might actually have to say to you? We could experiment with giving them a set amount of time to just be quiet after instructing them on how to quiet themselves inside. (Do we want to begin, as we did last year, by providing the students with an opportunity to ask questions on sheets of paper that we will address in future weeks?)

**October 5:** Who Am I to God? (from the title of the resource booklet): Prayer

This Christian Character Development Series comes in the form of handouts and worksheets to give to the group. However, I think it would be best if we simply take the material from the booklets and make it our own. Worksheets and handouts can take emphasis off of what it is we are trying to accomplish. We can use this lesson on prayer to open ourselves up to the kids, which we are going to have to do consistently if we expect them to open up to us. After opening up, we can discuss prayer itself in an objective conversation, then challenge them a little bit to think about prayer in their personal lives. We can introduce them to talking to Jesus, since we are aiming at getting them to develop a faith relationship with Him. This sets us up for next week, when we can get more personal. Perhaps we suggest that they really concentrate on praying each day during the next week to prepare them for small groups.

**October 12:** Small Groups: Prayer

When I say "small groups," I understand that there will be times when the entire group we have for the evening will be a small group and we won't be able to break them up. More often than not, the entire high school group is going to be a

small group in itself, but sometimes the middle school group may need to be split up into smaller groups to create a more intimate atmosphere where it is safer and easier to open up and be honest. This week, I envision us taking time to have each youth discuss their prayer experience in the past week. I would want us to be able to go around in a circle and have each youth reveal a personal prayer they may have. Ask them: What are your needs? This is going to be risky and we'll get a lot of superficial prayers, but it's what we do with those prayers that is important. If they know they can trust us (and each other) with the simple stuff, it will encourage them to trust us (and each other) with the real stuff. I envision the entire group taking each individual prayer and offering it up as a group OUT LOUD. Praying for and with one another has the power to break down some walls, especially if we are careful about how we do it.

**October 19:** Rob Bell's *Kickball*

This DVD addresses the idea of wrestling with God over what it is we want versus what it is He wants for us. It raises questions such as: Do you feel like you don't get the things you really want? Do you feel like God's denying you these things or maybe like He's not even listening to you? Have you ever been mad at God for not giving you what you'd asked for? Is it okay to question God? Have you ever felt like God did come through for you? If you got everything you asked for in life, do you think you'd be happy? *Kickball* provides a bridge between prayer and diving into what it means to be "successful" according to the world as opposed to according to God. It can take us into a deeper level of self examination with the youth.

**October 26:** Who Am I Really?: Success

Scripture base: Matthew 19:16-21. This lesson questions what it means to be successful. After having the youth establish a definition of "success," we can challenge them to come up with God's definition of "success." Opens up discussion to questions such as: What type of success are you seeking? Have you found some kind of success that you have sought? Did it fulfill you? How are you like or unlike the rich young man who talked with Jesus (in the scripture passage)? What, if anything, is keeping you from following Jesus wholeheartedly? Why haven't you dealt with it in the past? What could you do to deal with it now? This session can really get the youth to examine who they are becoming, and help them decide if they are becoming someone they want to be and if they are becoming someone God wants them to be. We could challenge them to evaluate their own idea of success as they pay special attention to their own daily actions in the following week(s).

**November 2:** Small Groups (Possibly interchange with November 9)

Share personal experiences with the challenges we gave the youth last week. Encourage community by challenging the youth to become accountable to one another by sharing more personal information. Make it clear that what happens at Cut2Christ stays at Cut2Christ. This is not a time to attain gossip to use against one another. This is a safe place to come to Jesus and a Christian community.

**November 9: Who Am I Really?: God's Guidance**

Scripture base: Psalm 119:105 and Romans 8:28-39. This lesson addresses the idea of trusting in God's guidance and surrendering to His will. It opens up questions such as: What questions about your future would you like to ask God? Why do you think God chooses to reveal our future paths only a step at a time? Have you experienced God's guidance in your life? How? Have you trusted it? Have you fought it? We can also use the story of Joseph (from the Old Testament); how he went from his father's house to the Pharaoh's house in his journey. This is a good session to take advantage of sharing our personal experiences in trusting in God's guidance and how it has shaped us into the people we are. Offers a good opportunity to let the youth see more of what makes us tick so they can trust us more.

**November 16: Large Group Thanksgiving Event**

I envision us, in our journey of the first few weeks, revealing to ourselves and one another many blessings. As leaders, we should encourage the youth to see blessings and not be focusing only on their troubles. That doesn't mean we discount their troubles. It means we don't let them settle into trouble as a way of life. If we are conscious about this, we can lead up to a Thanksgiving celebration as a Christian community of youth and can celebrate on this evening. Perhaps we could even have a Thanksgiving meal together. We'll have a better sense of what God is calling us to do as Thanksgiving approaches.

**November 23: Thanksgiving Week-No Youth Group**

**November 30: Fun Night at Teen Center**

**December 7, 14, & 21: Christmas Caroling**

**December 28 & January 4: Rest Weeks-No Youth Group**

**January 11: Fun Night: Rollerskating**

**January 18: Rob Bell's *Rain***

This DVD addresses the troubles we experience in life-storms, upsets, tragedies-the rain. It raises questions such as: What are some of the storms in your life? Is it raining now? Do you think God intentionally puts us through trials? Is there an easier way for us to learn? Have you ever felt like God failed to come through for you? Looking back, do you still feel the same? Do you ever act like everything is okay even when it isn't? Why do we do this? What does your junk look like? Is it stopping you from crying out to God? Do you have anyone in your life who you would do anything for? Do you think that's how God feels about you? I envision this DVD and subsequent discussions providing a wonderful opportunity to dive into personal healing with our youth, which we can focus on the rest of the year. If we get them to examine their wounds and own up to them, we have a better

chance of getting them to know Jesus. We can do that beginning with this DVD and doing intense follow-up in the following months.

**January 25:** Who Am I Inside? Comfort in Times of Trouble

Scripture base: John 11:32-35, Job 1:13-22, and Job 42:12-16. This lesson addresses the way in which we are affected by troubles and the way we may let troubles interfere with our relationship with God. It raises questions such as: What is the worst thing you remember ever happening in your life? What emotions did you experience in that event? What do the scriptures reveal about our reactions to trauma in our lives? Where is God when we are hurting?

**OR Who Am I to Others?: Never Alone**

Scripture base: Psalm 22:12-21, 1 Kings 19:1-18, and Matthew 10:29-31. This lesson addresses loneliness and feeling the presence of God in our times of pain. It raises questions such as: What's the difference between being alone and being lonely? What things cause you to feel lonely? What emotions go along with being lonely? What has given you comfort in times of loneliness? What answers does the world offer when we are lonely? What does God offer?

-Either of these lessons would allow us to get the kids to examine where they feel God is. In locating Him, they can be encouraged to pull Him in closer and deepen their relationships with Him.

**February 1:** Small Groups: What is the rain in your life?

Time to get personal again and open up about the pain that is there. Again, this will be delicate, but it can be done. We just have to be sensitive to every person and how they are reacted to by the group to ensure the fact that no one is put to shame for the rain that is in their life or the wounds they have.

**February 8, 15, & 22:** Modified SES with small groups

I'm envisioning Fr. Paul using these three weeks to take the youth through a modified version of the Spiritual Enrichment Seminar. It may be beneficial for us to explore the areas explored in that seminar with the youth, though we'd want to be careful not to get more intense than what they can handle. Maybe we will need to modify the time we use-perhaps less time, perhaps more time will be necessary. We'll have to listen to what Jesus is saying at this time.

**March 1:** Ash Wednesday: Area Wide Healing Mass?

**March 8:** Rob Bell's *Luggage*

This DVD addresses the baggage we carry by failing to surrender ourselves and our wounds to God and by failing to forgive others who have done us wrong. It raises questions such as: What kind of wounds do you have? How have your wounds shaped who you are today? Have you ever really gotten revenge? If so, how did it make you feel afterwards? If we take revenge when we get hurt, do you think it's like saying to God, "I think I can handle this better than you"? If God's right there when people get hurt, why do you think He doesn't step in to stop it from happening? Why is God's forgiveness of us so crucial to our forgiveness of

others? Can we forgive somebody without being able to be around them? Do you have people like that in your life? Do you believe forgiveness is really more about the one forgiving than the one being forgiven? Does that view on forgiveness make it easier to forgive? If someone you need to forgive died before you made amends, what kinds of regrets would you have? With discussion as related to those questions, the youth can really begin to look deeper into themselves to see where they need healing.

**March 15: Who Am I to Others?: Forgiveness**

Scripture base: Matthew 18:21-35. This lesson discusses forgiveness and how it affects us all—those who forgive, those who are forgiven, and the relationships between us all, including Jesus. It opens up questions such as: Do you think anyone is beyond God's forgiveness through Jesus? If so, who do you think might fit into this category? Why? This lesson really challenges the participants to think about people they need to forgive and people they need to apologize to. It opens the door to encourage them to make apologies they need to make. If we challenge them to do so, we can talk about that next week in small groups.

**March 22: Small Groups**

Discuss how youth are coping with the issues we've dragged up in the previous weeks. Have they made apologies? Have they worked towards forgiving those who've done them wrong? Have any weights been lifted? Depending upon how the previous weeks have gone, we may need to take a time out. These sessions, all in a row, have the potential to become quite intense, and the youth may not be ready for that. If we need a time out, I'd be more than happy to give a large-group talk that gives a reality check in the healing process. I'd be talking about my own experiences and how difficult it is to remain committed to a healing journey when it becomes REAL, when you step pretty far out of your comfort zone. This may reassure them in their walks and, if not, it opens the door to discussion, one-on-one or in a group-setting, about the reality of taking the time to heal one's wounds. This may or may not be necessary to do, depending upon how the youth are reacting. It may be something we need to do earlier or later, but something we should keep in mind.

**March 29: Rob Bell's *Lump***

This DVD addresses the idea that we are broken and we are sinners, but there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. It challenges viewers to stop hiding from Jesus for fear of being punished and go to God to help heal us of our brokenness. This is a heart-wrenching DVD that, for now, I'm going to let speak for itself. When you view the DVD, you'll see what I mean.

**April 5: Who Am I Inside?: Guilt**

There are many scripture bases included with this lesson. Among them are 1 John 1:8-10 and Romans 8:1-2, 33-39. Gospel passages focus on Judas and his guilt in betraying Jesus. This lesson discusses the effect guilt has on us—our inner and outer selves. It raises questions such as: How is it possible for someone to do a



terrible thing and yet feel no remorse or guilt? Where does guilt come from? If you could take a safe, free “guilt vaccine” and never feel guilt again, would you take it? Why or why not? This lesson, as well as the lessons on forgiveness, may not be necessary, depending upon whether or not we do a modified version of the spiritual enrichment seminar, when we do it, and how we do it. If we don’t do this lesson, we could spend some time in small groups. We’ll know what to do when the time comes.

**April 12:** Holy Week: Small Groups and Concluding Healing Event

This week, small groups could be done for a bit and might be necessary. But we should also bring everyone together for a large-group healing event. That could be something such as a healing mass for the youth (just the four of us and the youth who attend Cut2Christ that evening). Or we can think something else up. That’s just the sense I have at this time-we need a strong wrap-up of the year’s journey.

**April 19:** Rest Week-No Youth Group

**April 26:** Fun Night-Outdoor activities, cookout, fire, etc.

## Appendix B

I composed the following letter to send to seven parishes in New London in order to request interviews with other local youth ministry leaders to assist me in my research:

---

### INTERVIEW REQUEST

---

**TO:** YOUTH COORDINATOR  
**FROM:** MARY KLEIST  
**SUBJECT:** YOUTH MINISTRY IN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY  
**DATE:** 3/24/06

Dear Youth Coordinator:

My name is Mary Kleist. I am a member of the youth ministry team at St. John's Episcopal Church in New London. Additionally, I am a student at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and am a member of the University Honors Program on campus. In order to complete the requirements to graduate with honors, I must complete a mini-thesis project, which basically entails researching a real-life problem and proposing possible solutions.

As one who is actively interested in committing to ministry as a career, I have been researching youth ministry as my thesis project in an attempt to maximize the potential we have at St. John's to touch the local youth with Christ's love. In so doing, I am interested in finding out the ways in which you use your gifts in your youth ministry to foster a strong relationship between your youth and our Lord. I would like to meet with you to discuss your youth ministry, that I may be informed of the various ways local youth are touched by Jesus. I am sending a written request rather than using the telephone simply because I realize that, during the summer months, it is not likely for me to catch a youth coordinator at your church.

Although many youth ministries are not active during the summer months, I would like to meet with you before the school year resumes in September. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are willing to and interested in meeting with me to discuss youth ministry. You may contact me by whichever mode works best for you: N1176 Redwing Drive, Greenville, WI 54942; (920) 538 3488; or [Quitecontrary27@gmail.com](mailto:Quitecontrary27@gmail.com).

I will greatly appreciate your assistance in this project, but I understand if you are not interested or simply do not have time to meet with me. In any case, I would like to hear back from you. If you are not interested at all in communicating with me, please indicate that by checking the corresponding box on the enclosed card and mailing it back to me in the envelope provided (there is a stamp inside the envelope for you to secure onto the envelope if you choose to send the card back). If you would like to assist me in my research, but are unable to meet with me, I can send you a list of questions in the mail (or email) to answer and send back to me. If you would like to participate in this manner, please check the corresponding box on the enclosed card, also indicating your name and the address (postal or electronic address-whichever you would prefer to use) I should send the questions to.

I thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you!



## Appendix C

I composed the following outline of questions to use in interviewing other youth leaders:

### **New London Churches: Interview Questions regarding Youth Programs**

Begin by informing interviewee of who I am, what I do at St. John's, my purpose in interviewing them, and my thesis project.

Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Location \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your position in your youth program (do you run it, assist with it, are you volunteer or paid)? What are your duties? How long have you held your position? What lead you into this ministry?
2. Who else is a part of your youth ministry team? What are their positions? How much contact do you have with one another, aside from the time you spend with the youth?
3. Do you know anything about the history of your youth program before you came? How the program looked-activities, average attendance rates, teaching time (whether it be Sunday school or something like the Catholic CCD)?
4. What was the state of the program when you began? What types of activities were being done, average attendance rates, curricular focus/time? What did you see in the program that was effective? What did you see that was ineffective and needed changing? What did you do to make those changes? How did the youth react? How did the rest of your youth ministry team react? What is the state of the program today? How many or what percentage of your youth are members of your church? Attend church regularly?
5. What is the frequency of meetings you have with your youth group, including activities, trips, and regular time to teach? What do you do in your time together? Do you meet at all during the summer? Have you taken any mission trips?
6. What is the role of the family for your ministry? (Do you include parents, talk about parents, etc.?) How visible are the youth to the rest of your faith community?
7. Did you participate in youth group as a kid? How has that affected your attitudes and goals as a leader of youth ministry?
8. Do you share your personal faith with your youth? (Have you ever heard of incarnational ministry or relational ministry? What's your take on them?) How much emphasis do you place on prayer? Is it a private emphasis or a public emphasis? i.e., do your kids see prayer as important to your ministry, personally and as it affects them?

## Appendix D

I composed the following questionnaire to send to campers and counselors of our diocesan summer camp (though I got no responses):

### CAMPERS

What did you expect from camp upon arrival?

Were your expectations met or was your actual experience a surprise?

What were your attitudes and emotions toward the teachings and activities at the beginning of the week (Sunday-Tuesday)? Midweek (Wednesday-Thursday)? End of the week (Friday-Saturday)?

Did camp affect your perspective of God? Did it change your understanding of the role you play in your relationship with God?

Has your life changed since you returned home from camp? (Can be actual changes in how you live or simply changes in how you look at life.) If so, how?

### STAFF

Consists of the camper questions above, but also have them evaluate their perception of how the campers would answer those questions, as well as having them answer them for themselves.

## Appendix E

I composed the following letter to send to the youth ministry team along with the schedule outlined above before we began our program for the 2005-2006 school year:

Fr. Paul, Dan, Kathy and Tony~

As I have discussed with you, I have been working for a few months on gaining a new vision and direction for our Wednesday nights of youth discipleship. I have taken a look at quite a few different approaches to youth ministry. They all seem to try to come up with a formula or a list of principles to concentrate on that will allow them to guide their youth ministry to be “successful.” All the programs have different ideas of what it means to be “successful.” No program that I found incorporates the importance of the mission of Jesus to proclaim His healing love to a broken people who did not really understand Him.

I am not really concerned about achieving “success.” I am concerned that we do what God is calling us to do. In doing so, we will be “successful.” After a year of mostly observing how we approach our youth, I am concerned that we are guided by our fears too much. I think we have been too afraid to scare the youth away to really challenge them in their faith. I believe our fears are well founded, but rather than allowing them to hold us back, I would like us to take our fears and use them to guide us in how we approach our youth in a challenge of faith, rather than allowing our fears to hold us back from challenging the youth at all.

I read a portion of Doug Fields’ *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*. While it has some good information in it, I was really turned off by the emphasis put on administrative ideas, such as having a purpose statement, making sure every youth leader understands and has memorized the purpose statement, and including different principles in the planning of youth activities and education. That’s all well and good, but what about healing Jesus’s broken flock? And His healing love? I believe that is the focus we need to adopt. I thought for a while about different ways of stating our purpose, but to be honest, that kind of thing is not my forte. I like to keep things simple because I think Jesus’ message is simple-LOVE. Therefore, if we were to adopt a purpose statement, my best suggestion is that it be something such as: “To bring the healing love of Jesus to the youth in a way they can understand it.” I don’t know that we necessarily need a purpose statement separate from the mission statement of the church. Like I said, that’s a detail I am not too concerned about. I am just concerned that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing and I think we are a small enough team to be able to discuss and understand that within our group without having to spend time putting it down into a concise, yet detailed, statement. Here are the details I *have* spent much time praying on and thinking about:

First things first, I think we should have a catchy name for our Wednesday night discipleship program. I came up with Cut2Christ. That came to me because I see a lot of garbage taught out there in the world about Jesus and I see the youth hungry for the truth. So let’s cut out all the fluff and get right to the heart of Jesus and His message. That’s what I’d like that name to mean to us and to our youth. I want them to understand we

won't sugarcoat Jesus, because Jesus doesn't need sugarcoating. I want us to be real with the youth, because that's something they don't get enough of in the "real" world. I am going to use the term "Cut2Christ" within the rest of this letter, but that name is negotiable if you have other suggestions.

The next area I want to improve on is community. Our youth like one another well enough, but they are not as cohesive as God calls a Christian community to be. I understand that this is due, in large part, to the fact that many of our youth come from different schools and do not have time together aside from Wednesday nights. We can do something about that: I will be available to be at the church by 5:00 P.M. on Wednesday nights. I feel we need to begin Cut2Christ at that time. If possible, we could provide pizza and soda for the youth who come early to hang out with one another. We have the teen rooms and games for them to play. I also would like to purchase the *Joan of Arcadia* television series on DVD and show an episode of that each evening as we enjoy dinner and one another's company. This show offers many profound perspectives about God (and His love) that get to the heart of the teen experience and I envision it provoking great discussions & opportunities to ask questions.

As we have discussed time and time again, it is important for us to get our youth into some kind of leadership positions as related to their faith journey. This was the idea behind the Youth Council we tried last fall. Though the Youth Council never actively did anything, I think it introduced the youth to the idea that they need to take charge of their faith and put it into action. They were not quite ready to do that last year, but I think we can ease them into it a little bit easier this fall. I would like to meet with our existing members of the Youth Council and discuss with them the expectations we set forth before forming the council. Some of the members of the council did not take those expectations seriously and I would like to make clear that we intend this year to have a more active Youth Council. Therefore, those who are not serious about committing to the responsibility of being a leader in that capacity will be allowed to step down and be replaced by someone who is serious about it. I do not think it will be a good idea to start from scratch with the Youth Council this year. Eventually, that could be something we have elections for each year, but at this point, I think it is important that we retain a few of the members who were with us last year, simply so we do not have to risk the possibility of having to start from scratch again in the event that elections produce a completely new group of council members.

The responsibility I would like to see us give to the Youth Council right away is planning at least two service events for this fall. Ideally, I would love to do one each month, but let's start slowly! In order to ensure the fact that we get these events properly planned and carried out, I would like to establish regular Youth Council meetings beginning at 6:15 every other Wednesday night, beginning sometime within our first few weeks of Cut2Christ. Perhaps the Youth Council could take an active role in whatever we can get together to do with the Teen Center, or The Hot Spot. We may also give the youth the opportunity to respond to what they are experiencing during or how they are feeling about discipleship time. Essentially, that is something we should be giving them the opportunity to do regularly, but sometimes they need to be in an environment separate

from the actual discipleship time to be honest with themselves and others in their reactions. We could use this time to offer the opportunity to talk about any concerns they may have.

Just as the Youth Council needs more time together to really accomplish its goals, I think we as youth leaders need to set aside more time together to discuss what we are doing. At senior camp this summer, I found that the meeting time with other counselors to debrief and discuss concerns was always in short supply and very important to accomplishing God's goals for the week. For our discipleship program, we need to be more intentional about discussing our goals in our time spent with the youth. As well, we need to discuss with one another more regularly how we are seeing the Spirit moving within the youth discipleship program in order to listen to where the Spirit is guiding us to take the program. I want us all to understand and communicate to the youth that we are in this journey together. We are not here to erase whatever faith relationship they have with Jesus and replace it with a cake-mix faith. We need to communicate that we are all journeying-there is no end goal that we, as leaders, have reached that qualifies us to tell them what and how to believe. But at the same time, we are the LEADERS, therefore we need to be concerned about LEADING. In order to do that, we need to take time together to listen to Jesus and see where He is guiding us. I would ask that, if you are not already doing this, you set time aside specifically to pray about and discuss with Jesus your task as a youth leader and how that fits into a larger task for us as a team. Begin that now and continue to do so throughout the year. Then when we get together to meet as a team, we will be better able to communicate with one another. I suggest that we also meet every other week on the weeks the Youth Council is not meeting, as I'd like to be at the Youth Council meetings. Our leaders' meetings would not necessarily last long. If you could make it by 6:30, I think that would be a sufficient amount of time to discuss our concerns as a group, especially if we make sure we are doing that regularly so our concerns do not build up. As well, we should perhaps keep weekly record of what we are doing and how it is working for future reference. That's something we can discuss before we begin the year.

So this takes us up to 7:00 P.M. on Wednesday nights. I think, at this time, we need to be more intentional about praying up specifically for the evening. I also feel the youth need to see us doing this. I don't mean we walk over to the middle of whatever they are doing and make it a point to pray so they all can see us. It just seems to me that we need to pray as a team before we begin ministering to the kids, and let the kids see that we are doing that regularly. If we communicate that prayer is important to us personally, they will be better able to accept it as important to them. I think we should then incorporate some worship time into the beginning of the evening each week. Very simple-I think we should sing a worship song together as a group. Then we can pray with the kids for the evening. Then we can go on to our regularly scheduled activities.

(Here's a recap of the schedule that I have laid out above:

5:00-7:00: Youth fellowship time: dinner and time to hang out together.

6:15 (every other week): Youth Council meeting. All are welcome, but those who do not wish to participate are welcome to continue relaxing until 7:00.



6:30 (every other week, opposite Youth Council meetings): Youth Ministry Leaders' meeting.

7:00-8:30: Cut2Christ discipleship time.)

This brings us to curricular concerns: what does Jesus want us to bring to the youth this year in the discipleship program? I have prayed long and hard about this. As I mentioned earlier, I strongly believe we need to bring the healing love of Jesus to our youth. The challenge is in bringing it to them in a way that they can understand it. This will be a delicate task. This is where our fears about scaring them away come in. We need to acknowledge our fears, as they tell us to be gentle, but we cannot let them keep us from doing Jesus's work. Again, this is something I have prayed long and hard on and I believe we need to take the youth through a journey that explores Jesus Christ by examining themselves to discover their own woundedness. I feel we are being called to communicate to the youth that they are part of a community and that their consistent presence is important to the health of the community. We can do this in the way we format Cut2Christ. We need to use a cycle in our discipleship activities. This gives us a firm foundation to guide us as leaders, but also keeps things changing for the youth, who will be bored if we decide on a format and stick to it every week. It needs to be clear to the youth that each week builds upon the previous week, and that subsequent weeks will continue to build upon preceding weeks, but we cannot repeat formats or activities each week. But we do need repetition on a larger scale to keep things familiar and somewhat comfortable so that the youth do not come into each week feeling like they have to get used to a new atmosphere each time.

I sat down with the discipleship resources I have and prayed for guidance as to how to set the year up. I received a clear picture of our journey for the year and was guided to plan our major lesson topics for each week of the entire upcoming year. Now, please understand that I am not saying I have the year planned out and set in stone. I simply have a vision of where we need to go and how we can get there. We need to be responding to the youth each week and remain flexible in what we are doing to make sure we are doing what God is calling us to do. This is why it will be important for us to meet with one another as leaders to make sure we are RESPONDING to the Spirit AND the youth. We need to be constantly reevaluating our goals and plans. That's the only way to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish each week, as well as overall.

The general cycle that I have received in prayer begins with one of Rob Bell's DVDs. We watch a DVD and use that week to do some actual teaching. While we are handing over the responsibility to the youth for their own individual faith relationship with Jesus, we are still leading them. Therefore, we need to spend some time as teachers in a capacity that they understand teachers to be. We can prepare discussion-based lessons around the DVDs, but they also offer great opportunities to prepare "formal lessons." We can then follow up the next week with a lesson from a series called the *Christian Character Development Series*, which is mainly discussion-based and gives the students more responsibility in their discipleship. The following week, we can use a small-group format that really pulls the youth together and allows them to be accountable to one another by discussing their personal experiences in the previous weeks. This also encourages

intimate growth as a community. We, as leaders, are there to respond to their needs, stimulate discussion, and foster community, but we really need to focus on letting them explore their own faith by talking with their peers.

This is a general overview of the cycle I feel we are supposed to use. As I have already said, I have been inspired with a plan of action for the year and have included a description of that plan as an attachment to this letter. Please take a look at the schedule and lesson plans I included. Be intentional about doing so and pray on it to reveal to us, as a team, what it is we need to do with these plans (Are they appropriate? Are they complete? Is it what God wants us to be doing? What else do we need to do? Is it too much?). When you have had time to review the material, we will get together at a time convenient for the four of us to discuss our concerns.

Thank you for your commitment to our youth and thank you for the opportunity to work with you all! It's been a wonderful learning experience already and I look forward to intensifying our walk with our youth as we continue to work together!